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ABSTRACT

A review of the school-effectiveness literature found that the concept of school effectiveness has been shaped by researchers and policymakers, not by those being asked to implement the concept. This paper presents findings of a study that sought to establish an understanding of what "school effectiveness" meant to the people involved in implementation at the local level. Data were obtained from a survey of the principal, 3 teachers, 3 parents, and 3 students (in the secondary schools only) from 81 schools in Victoria, Australia, and from 64 schools from 7 states in the United States. A total of 1,000 responses were received--427 from Victorian respondents and from 573 American respondents. The American sample, particularly principals and teachers, reported higher levels of concern with the outputs of education, and the Australian sample expressed more concern with the process components that help to shape education, such as a balanced curriculum and an emphasis on student personal and social development. However, both groups identified similar conditions that lead to school effectiveness--good leadership and staff, sound policies, and a safe and supportive environment in which staff, parents, and teachers are encouraged to work as a team toward common goals. Finally, almost 60 percent of each group indicated that their schools were more effective than other schools, which indicates a resounding measure of support for the work of schools. Seven tables are included. Appendices contain descriptions of the 18 elements of an effective school, demographic characteristics of the sample, and statistics on the role of the effective school by country and position. (LMI)

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# Community Perceptions of the Goals of an Effective School: A comparison between communities in Australia and USA

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**Community Perceptions of the Goals of an Effective School**

by

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*The pursuit of quality in education cannot be treated as a short-term, one-off exercise. It is a permanent priority. Education is not an assembly-line process of mechanically increasing inputs and raising productivity. How to improve its quality raises fundamental questions about societal aims, the nature of participation in decision-making at all levels, and the very purpose of the school as an institution.*

*(OECD, 1989:1)*

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The issue of the effectiveness of schools has been of concern to researchers, school policy makers and administrators for over twenty years. Significant reports on equality of educational outcomes were produced in a number of countries during the 1960s and 1970s. Many of these reports such as Plowden, (1966) in the United Kingdom; Coleman, (1966) in the United States and Karmel (1973) in Australia identified the close correspondence between educational success and family background.

The Coleman Report (1966) in particular, generated a response from researchers and practitioners which attempted to refute the basic premise of all of these reports which was summed up by the following paragraph:

> Schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context... this very lack of an independent effect means that the inequality imposed on children by their home, neighbourhood and peer environment are carried along to become the inequalities with which they confront adult life at the end of school. For equality of educational opportunity must imply a strong effect of schools that is independent of the child's immediate environment, and that strong independence is not present in American schools.
>
> (Coleman, 1966:325)

In the past twenty years or so, firstly in America and the United Kingdom, and then in many of the nations of the world, the issue of school effectiveness developed from a response to a critical perception of school's failings as identified by the Coleman and

other reports to a world wide concern that sought to demonstrate the premise that, given certain conditions, schools can and do make a difference to a child's ability to succeed.

The direction that the debate on school effects has not been the same in all countries and there is no common definition of what school effectiveness means, or to how it can be measured. In fact, the development of an 'effective schools movement', driven particularly by research emanating from the United States, where a concern to improve the academic performance of students from minority or poorer backgrounds has been a key issue, has not been universally accepted as providing an appropriate view of the complexities of the issues involved. Consequently, some conflict has been generated in different countries, where, although the concern for making schools more effective is a common one, the concentration solely on inputs and outputs with the subsequent orientation towards standardised testing and increasing minority group performance on them, is not. Scheerens (1990) provides an analysis of the complexities within the field of school effectiveness research and proposed a model that incorporated the ingredients that relate to issues of context and school wide and classroom processes in addition to the inputs and outputs which characterise most of the American 'effective schools movement' research.

The complexity of this issue is brought about by there being no single definition of education and no common view of the role of schools. With no common view of the role of schools, it is impossible to conceive of a universal acceptance of any definition of an effective school that incorporates a statement of content within it.

There seems to be a general acceptance by the public that when an attempt is made to improve schools that the underlying question is 'What is wrong with schools today?' and that when the issue of quality is raised the implication is that schools are currently bad. News headlines such as 'Teaching Fails Young - Poll' (The Herald, June 4, 1985) and consistent reports by employers that their newly appointed staff do not have the necessary skills for the job help to publicise and push the debate in a negative way. Yet this debate in many respects fails to use the documentary evidence that suggests that the opposite might well be true. For instance, although the absolute number of children who attended Australian schools increased by just over ten per cent from 1969 to 1987, the number of people attending higher (non TAFE) education increased by over one hundred and forty five percent. In 1969 about eleven per cent of the total population of Australia were attending higher education institutions, but by 1987 this had increased to almost twenty four percent. During the same period of time the apparent retention rates of children at school have almost doubled from about thirty percent in 1969 to nearly sixty per cent in 1987 (Australian Year Books, 1973, 1982, 1990). It would appear from these figures that schools had increased their effectiveness over that period of time by increasing the number of students from all backgrounds who completed school. If the numbers of people enrolling at higher levels of education can be used as a means for judging successful

completion of school, then it appeared that not only are more children completing school, but that they are doing it successfully as well.

In some ways the criticisms that are directed at schools are due to the strategies used to determine the levels of school effectiveness. The sorts of measures that are used during the process of determining the effectiveness of particular schools create inbuilt difficulties. In most cases individual schools have been identified as being effective or not on the basis of external viewpoints. In much of the early American research into school effectiveness, the sole criterion for judging the effectiveness of a particular school was student performance on externalised and standardised tests. One of the problems that this criterion led to was that, that if all schools improved their performance on standardised tests by fifty per cent, the raw scores would have increased, but the judgements about the individual schools would not have changed. Those schools that were judged as being effective because their students' scores put them in the top ten percent of schools in the country would still be there, but the schools who were in the bottom ten per cent would still be judged as being ineffective despite the fifty per cent increase in their students' performance. These external results also do not account for the student's initial capabilities (that is, the actual increase in performance) or the individual school's possible manipulation of the result (for instance, by advising the poor student to go to another school).

But the use of external criteria as the main focus of a school's 'effectiveness' is not exclusive to American research. In some respects the external criteria for schools in the United Kingdom, such as recorded delinquency and public examination results generated the same difficulties for the research, but some attempt was made to temper this external perception by the inclusion of school based data such as behaviour and absenteeism and by also collecting student intake data so that the judgements could be made relating to student gains in performance rather than simply student performance. Further, interviews of people who were involved in the school programs helped to identify the more complex issues that dealt with relationships and involvement. Two Australian studies into school effectiveness also used external viewpoints to determine a list of schools that were considered 'effective'. Both Mellor and Chapman (1984) and Caldwell and Misko (1983) used senior officials of the Departments of Education in Victoria and Tasmania to identify 'effective' schools in their respective studies.

In comparison to the great deal of research that looks at externally imposed views of effectiveness in schools, few studies have identified issues of effectiveness from the point of view of the local school community. Horn (1987) undertook a study involving local community perceptions of quality indicators in eighty small schools in Kansas, the North York Board of Education in Ontario, Canada (1984) asked parents about their perceptions of Priority 1 Schools, Galindo and Baenen (1989) in Austin, Texas investigated the views of parents, teachers, administrators and students with respect to

school quality and effectiveness and Mortimore et al (1988) interviewed parents as part of their data collection for School Matters. In Australia, Aglinskas et al (1988) and the Australian Effective Schools Project (McGaw et al., 1992) asked people at the school level about their perceptions of the effectiveness of schools.

The current research attempted to identify the views of the people most actively involved in any school's work, the principals, teachers, parents and students. Rather than making external assumptions about what an effective school is, what characteristics it should contain and whether any individual school is effective or not, this study used the school effectiveness research to provide the basis for an internal review conducted by the people most intimately associated with the school.

## THE STUDY

A review of the school effectiveness literature established that the definition of 'school effectiveness', the concept upon which a lot of this world wide activity is based, has been shaped, not by the people who are now being asked to implement the concept, but by researchers and bureaucrats who are at least one step, and in some cases many more, away from the situation where the concept is expected to be turned into practice. It also established that different countries, and different people within the same country, are unable to agree on any single definition of what constitutes an effective school. Yet, much of the school based decision making literature suggests that if decisions relating to school people and situations were made at the school level then there is a better chance of having the right decisions made than there was if they are made away from the school at a district, regional or state level.

The purpose of the current study was to establish an understanding of what 'school effectiveness' meant and included from the point of view of the people involved in the implementation of this concept at the school level. It gave the people who are involved with the implementation of the effective school concepts, principals, the teachers, school councillors, parents and the students, an opportunity to identify their perspective of what an effective school was and what elements needed to be present before they were prepared to call a school 'an effective school'. The initial study was conducted in schools in the metropolitan area of Melbourne, Victoria, and a subsequent study was conducted in both schools that have been identified by name and action as community schools and non-community schools in seven states of the United States of America to establish whether or not the data emerging from the study in Australia would be similar to those emanating from schools in the United States. For each school, the principal, three teachers, three parents and (in secondary schools only) three students were asked to respond to the survey instrument. The variables considered in the study were: the perceptions of the respondents in relation to possible roles of an effective school; the perceptions of the

respondents in relation to important elements contributing to the effectiveness of a school and the perceptions of the respondents in relation to the effectiveness of their own school. Three questions were asked:

**a. What is the role of an effective school?**

The survey included ten statements rating the role of an effective school on a scale of 1 (Strongly Agree) to 5 (Strongly Disagree) by position categories of principal, teacher, parent and student. The ten roles were:

1. An effective school will provide students with a good understanding of basic academic skills.

2. An effective school will provide students with the skills necessary to become employed.

3. An effective school will provide students with the opportunity to develop leadership skills.

4. An effective school will provide students with a caring and supportive environment.

5. An effective school will provide students with the skills necessary to become a productive and useful citizen.

6. An effective school will provide students with the attitudes and skills necessary to develop a healthy understanding of themselves and others.

7. An effective school will provide students with a balanced curriculum that encourages a wide range of learning experiences.

8. An effective school will provide students with the opportunity to develop a value system that reflects the major values of our society.

9. An effective school will provide students with teachers who act as role models for the development of community values and habits.

10. An effective school will provide students with an opportunity to be involved in the decision making processes within the school.

**b. Which elements, that contribute to the effectiveness of a school's operations, are the most important?**

In this section, 18 elements were identified as being characteristics of and effective school and were ranked according to 'important', 'working well' and 'your priority'. Each of the eighteen elements contained a short description to clarify the heading (see appendix 1) . The eighteen selected elements were:

1. Clear school purpose (policy)
2. Academic and administrative leadership
3. Dedicated and qualified staff

4. Staff development
5. High expectations
6. Academic focus to the curriculum
7. Time on task
8. Monitoring student progress
9. Early identification of learning difficulties
10. Safe and orderly environment
11. Positive school climate
12. Home-school relations
13. School-based decision-making
14. Local involvement in the selection of senior staff
15. Teachers take responsibility for and are involved in school planning
16. The support of the responsible education authority
17. Positive motivational strategies
18. Opportunities for student involvement and responsibility

In each case respondents were asked to indicate:

- If they felt this element was important for the development of an effective school
- If they felt this element was working well in the respondent's school
- Which five elements (in priority order) they considered to be the most important to the development of an effective school.

**c. How effective is your school?**

Respondents were asked to the effectiveness of their school, compared to other schools in the state on a scale of 1 (most effective) to 5 (least effective). The alternatives were:

1. My school would be amongst the most effective schools in the state.
2. My school would be more effective than most schools in the state.
3. My school would be about as effective as other schools in the state.
4. My school would be less effective than most other schools in the state.
5. My school would be among the least effective schools in the state.

## SUMMARY OF RESULTS

### 1. Demographic information

In all, a total of 1000 responses were received, 427 from the Victorian sample and 573 from the United States sample. Responses were received from 81 schools in Victoria and 64 schools from seven states in the USA. In the American sample the following states participated: Georgia (18 responses), Michigan (40), Minnesota (20), New Hampshire (24), Utah (381), Virginia (42) and Wisconsin (48). Of the total sample, 39.7% came from elementary (primary) schools or elementary community schools and 59.2% came from secondary or secondary community schools. In addition, 12% of the respondents were principals, 34.9% were teachers, 31.6% were parents and 21.3% were students. A more detailed view of the demographic characteristics of the sample is contained in appendix 2.

## 2. Role of an effective school

For the whole sample, the means for the role of an effective school statements ranged from 1.224 to 1.873 which suggested that participants had a high personal level of agreement with all of the ten statements (see table 1). The roles which ranked the highest were 'academic skill', a 'balanced curriculum' and 'a caring environment'. The development of a 'value system' ranked last with 'student involvement in decision-making' coming a close second.

Table 1:
Roles of an effective school:
Mean scores for country samples

| TASK | USA (N = 573) | Australia (N = 427) | Total (N= 1000) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Academic | 1.138 | 1.340 | 1.224 |
| 2. Employment | 1.454 | 1.680 | 1.551 |
| 3. Leadership | 1.552 | 1.870 | 1.688 |
| 4. Caring Environment | 1.353 | 1.370 | 1.360 |
| 5. Citizenship | 1.336 | 1.510 | 1.410 |
| 6. Understanding Self | 1.513 | 1.450 | 1.486 |
| 7. Balanced Curriculum | 1.292 | 1.290 | 1.291 |
| 8. Value System | 1.795 | 1.980 | 1.873 |
| 9. Role Models | 1.505 | 1.980 | 1.707 |
| 10. Student Involvement | 1.738 | 1.980 | 1.841 |

Country Comparisons

In general, the American respondents were more strongly in agreement with all of the statements except for the 'understanding self and others' and 'balanced curriculum' where the Australian respondents were marginally more in favour. The American sample was significantly stronger for 'academic skills', 'employment', 'leadership', 'teachers as role models' and 'student involvement in decision-making' (at the .01 level) and 'citizenship' and 'value system' (at the .05 level).

When a comparison is made between the seven American states used in the sample, the views of respondents in Wisconsin are in most cases are less supportive of the role statements than are all of the other states. Wisconsin differs significantly from one or more states for all roles except 'student involvement'. On the other hand, only Minnesota and Utah are significantly less positive than any of the other states for any of the statements, Minnesota only for 'teachers as role models' and Utah, for 'leadership' 'value system (see table 2).

Table 2:
Roles of an effective school:
Mean scores for state samples

| TASK | Michigan | Wisconsin | N.Hampshire | Minnesota | Georgia | Utah | Virginia | Victoria (Aust) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | (N = 40) | (N = 48) | (N = 24) | (N = 20) | (N= 18) | (N = 381) | (N = 42) | (N = 427) |
| 1. Academic | 1.050 | 1.271 | 1.042 | 1.050 | 1.056 | 1.153 | 1.095 | 1.340 |
| 2. Employment | 1.350 | 1.604 | 1.458 | 1.400 | 1.278 | 1.464 | 1.238 | 1.680 |
| 3. Leadership | 1.450 | 1.708 | 1.417 | 1.350 | 1.278 | 1.586 | 1.429 | 1.870 |
| 4. Caring Environment | 1.300 | 1.417 | 1.083 | 1.350 | 1.222 | 1.392 | 1.262 | 1.370 |
| 5. Citizenship | 1.275 | 1.479 | 1.208 | 1.150 | 1.222 | 1.358 | 1.238 | 1.510 |
| 6. Understanding Self | 1.5 | 1.583 | 1.333 | 1.450 | 1.167 | 1.559 | 1.238 | 1.450 |
| 7. Balanced Curriculum | 1.250 | 1.333 | 1.083 | 1.250 | 1.333 | 1.315 | 1.190 | 1.290 |
| 8. Value System | 1.625 | 2.000 | 1.542 | 1.650 | 1.389 | 1.847 | 1.595 | 1.980 |
| 9. Role Models | 1.375 | 1.604 | 1.208 | 1.850 | 1.222 | 1.533 | 1.286 | 1.980 |
| 10. Student Involvement | 1.700 | 1.938 | 2.083 | 2.050 | 1.833 | 1.706 | 1.619 | 1.980 |

A line chart comparison of the various positions held within the schools is very revealing (see appendix 3). It showed that American principals were more positive than their Australian counterparts for most roles, significantly so for the 'employment', 'leadership', 'citizenship', 'value system', 'teachers as role models' and 'student involvement in decision-making' roles. Many of these may be explained by a significant proportion of the Australian sample coming from elementary schools while the majority of the American sample was secondary based. A similar breakdown occurred for the teacher samples, except for the final role 'student involvement in decision-making' where American and Australian teachers had almost identical mean scores.

However, American and Australian parents had similar responses for most of the roles, with American parents only being significantly more positive than their Australian counterparts for 'leadership' and 'teachers as role models'. American students were also significantly more positive than their Australian counterparts for most roles, with only 'understanding self and others', a 'balanced curriculum' and 'student involvement in decision-making' having similar levels of acceptance.

For 'employment', 'leadership', 'values system' and 'teachers as role models', all of the American respondent groups (principals, teachers, parents and students) were stronger in their support than any of the Australian groups. For the first two of these, it possibly reflects the significant proportion of the Australian sample coming from elementary schools while the majority of the American sample was secondary based, but the latter two may well reflect some differences in the two country's views on education and the respective roles of the home and the school in the raising of children.

Position Comparisons

However the pattern of responses for the various groups in the two countries is remarkably similar. In both Australian and the US samples, principals were almost always strongest in their support and the students were the weakest than any of the other groups for each of the roles. The only real exception to this was the role which considered 'student involvement in decision-making', where for both samples the student group was most strongly positive. Apart from this result, the only time that any of the other groups approached the principal group's strength of support was for 'employment' and a 'balanced curriculum', and again, this happened in both countries.

**3. Elements of an effective school**

In this section, respondents were asked to identify whether or not they felt the stated characteristics of an effective school were important or not (see table 3). They were also asked to identify which of the characteristics was currently working well in their school (see table 4). Finally, they were asked which five of the characteristics they considered to be most important to the development of an effective school(see table 5).

Table 3:
Important elements of an effective school:
Mean scores for country samples

| ELEMENT | USA (N = 573) | Australia (N= 427) | All people (N= 1000) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Policy | 0.851 | 0.895 | .870 |
| 2. Leadership | 0.816 | 0.771 | .797 |
| 3. Staff | 0.923 | 0.979 | .947 |
| 4. Staff Development | 0.745 | 0.766 | .754 |
| 5. High Expectations | 0.869 | 0.832 | .853 |
| 6. Academic Focus | 0.828 | 0.727 | .785 |
| 7. Time on Task | 0.778 | 0.765 | .772 |
| 8. Monitoring Progress | 0.818 | 0.876 | .843 |
| 9. Early Identification | 0.855 | 0.919 | .882 |
| 10. School Environment | 0.884 | 0.900 | .891 |
| 11. School Climate | 0.904 | 0.854 | .883 |
| 12. Home-School Relations | 0.861 | 0.914 | .884 |
| 13. School- Based Decisions | 0.773 | 0.758 | .767 |
| 14. School selects staff | 0.590 | 0.664 | .622 |
| 15. Teacher Responsibility | 0.823 | 0.869 | .843 |
| 16. Support of Authority | 0.742 | 0.773 | .755 |
| 17. Positive Motivation | 0.874 | 0.905 | .887 |
| 18. Student Involvement | 0.793 | 0.720 | .762 |

The role of the teacher in the development of the effective school became evident. It was the only feature of the whole study where a unanimous response was given. Both countries, and all states involved all agreed that 'dedicated and qualified staff' was the most important factor to the development of an effective school. It was ranked number one, on the basis of the number of people who expressed its importance (with over 94% of the sample identifying it as an important factor), on the basis of the priority given to it by the sample (in the Australian sample, this elements scored higher than the second and third ranked elements combined) and on the basis of the respondents who identified it as working well within the school. Clearly, the sample felt that teachers were currently performing up to their expectations, which negates many of the media reports that suggest that teachers were neither well qualified nor performing.

Table 4:
Most important elements for an effective school:
Priority rankings for country samples

| ELEMENT | USA | Australia |
|---|---|---|
| | (N = 573) | (N = 427) |
| 1. Policy | 4 | 2 |
| 2. Leadership | 3 | 3 |
| 3. Staff | 1 | 1 |
| 4. Staff Development | 13 | 13 |
| 5. High Expectations | 2 | 8 |
| 6. Academic Focus | 7 | 12 |
| 7. Time on Task | 11 | 11 |
| 8. Monitoring Progress | 15 | 10 |
| 9. Early Identification | 10 | 7 |
| 10. School Environment | 5 | 5 |
| 11. School Climate | 6 | 6 |
| 12. Home-School Relations | 8 | 9 |
| 13. School- Based Decisions | 14 | 15 |
| 14. School selects staff | 18 | 18 |
| 15. Teacher Responsibility | 12 | 14 |
| 16. Support of Authority | 17 | 16 |
| 17. Positive Motivation | 9 | 4 |
| 18. Student Involvement | 16 | 17 |

Other elements that were highly supported were 'positive motivation strategies' 'home-school relations' and 'school environment' (both USA and Australia), as well as 'early identification of learning difficulties' (Australia) and 'school climate' (USA). Elements that received least support were 'local involvement in the selection of staff', 'school-based decision-making' and 'time on task' (both USA and Australia) as well as 'academic focus to the curriculum' and 'student involvement' (Australia) and 'support of the relevant education authority' and 'staff development' (USA). In terms of simply counting the numbers of respondents who indicate that an element is important, there is quite a difference between the responses in Australia and the USA. Some of the elements selected in the top half by the American sample were in the bottom half of the Australian sample ('high expectations', 5th/10th; 'academic focus', 9th/16th) and vice-versa ('monitoring student progress', 11th/7th; 'teacher responsibility', 10th/8th). These seem to indicate a higher preference for outcomes on the part of the American sample and a preference for processes by the Australians.

Table 5:
Most important elements for an effective school:
Rankings for country samples

| ELEMENT | rank by importance | | rank by priority | | rank by 'working well' | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | USA | Australia | USA | Australia | USA | Australia |
| 1. Policy | 8 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 9 | 4 |
| 2.Leadership | 12 | 12 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 6 |
| 3. Staff | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 4. Staff Development | 16 | 13 | 13 | 13 | 5 | 16 |
| 5. High Expectations | 5 | 10 | 2 | 8 | 14 | 11.5 |
| 6. Academic Focus | 9 | 16 | 7 | 12 | 8 | 14 |
| 7. Time on Task | 14 | 14 | 11 | 11 | 12 | 10 |
| 8. Monitoring Progress | 11 | 7 | 15 | 10 | 6 | 9 |
| 9. Early Identification | 7 | 2 | 10 | 7 | 10 | 11.5 |
| 10. School Environment | 3 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 5 |
| 11. School Climate | 2 | 9 | 6 | 6 | 3 | 3 |
| 12.Home-School Relations | 6 | 3 | 8 | 9 | 16 | 2 |
| 13. School- Based Decisions | 15 | 15 | 14 | 15 | 15 | 7 |
| 14. School selects staff | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 17 |
| 15.Teacher Responsibility | 10 | 8 | 12 | 14 | 7 | 8 |
| 16. Support of Authority | 17 | 11 | 17 | 16 | 17 | 18 |
| 17. Positive Motivation | 4 | 4 | 9 | 4 | 11 | 13 |
| 18. Student Involvement | 13 | 17 | 16 | 17 | 13 | 15 |

However, when a comparison is made on the basis of priority between Australia and the USA, both groups have a similar response. 'Dedicated and qualified staff', 'academic and administrative leadership', 'clear school purpose' 'school climate' and 'safe and orderly environment' were in the top six for both countries and 'local involvement in the selection of staff', 'student involvement', 'support of the relevant education authority', 'school-based decision-making' and 'staff development' were in the bottom six for both countries. The only elements that do not conform at the top of the order are 'high expectations' (2nd in the USA, 8th in Australia) and 'positive motivation strategies' (4th in Australia and 9th in the USA).

The result of the analysis demonstrated that elements related to the school staff, such as 'dedicated and qualified staff' and 'academic and administrative leadership', together with the processes developed within the total school environment, such as 'clear school goals', 'safe and orderly environment' and 'positive school climate' were seen by the sample as the most important elements for the development of the effective school. Elements that might be considered as part of the instructional procedures used by the school were seen to be less significant, and those elements that related to the organisational processes of the school or the school system were seen to be least important of all.

The results for the question of 'working well' indicate that most of the items considered to be particularly important are currently working well within the schools. However, some areas need to be developed further. In Australia, 'positive motivation strategies' was listed as 4th most important, but was only 13th on the list of elements that were working well. In the United States, 'high expectations' was listed as 2nd most important, but was only 8th on the list of elements that were working well. Statistically there was a high level of correlation for the responses from the two countries and for all of the four groups within each of the countries as well.

**4. Effectiveness of my school**

In this section respondents were asked to make judgements on their school in comparison with other schools in the state (see table 6).

Table 6: Perceived levels of effectiveness

| Rating | USA | | Australia | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | n = | % | n = | % | n = | % |
| 1. One of the most effective schools in the state | 128 | 21.8 | 82 | 19.2 | 210 | 21.0 |
| 2. More effective than most schools | 208 | 36.3 | 187 | 43.8 | 395 | 39.5 |
| 3. About as effective as other schools | 209 | 36.5 | 148 | 34.7 | 357 | 35.7 |
| 4. Less effective than other schools | 25 | 4.4 | 8 | 1.9 | 33 | 3.3 |
| 5. One of the least effective schools in the state | 3 | 0.5 | 2 | 0.5 | 5 | 0.5 |

Less than 5 % of the respondents in either country, and less than 4% overall, felt that their school was less effective than other schools, whereas 60% felt their school was more effective than other schools. The mean score for the whole sample was 2.215, which tends to favour 'more effective than most schools in the state', with the Australian mean (2.205) being marginally more in favour than the American sample (2.223).

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| USA | n = 573 | 2.223 |
| Australia | n = 427 | 2.205 |
| Whole sample | n = 1000 | 2.215 |

In the United States, the Georgia, Wisconsin and New Hampshire results were significantly stronger than those of Virginia and Minnesota, although in each case the sample was small. The Utah sample, which was by far the largest of the samples in the United States, was somewhere in the middle of the two extreme views.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Michigan | n = 40 | 2.300 |
| Wisconsin | n = 48 | 2.083 |
| New Hampshire | n = 24 | 2.083 |
| Minnesota | n = 20 | 2.650 |
| Georgia | n = 18 | 1.833 |
| Utah | n = 381 | 2.259 |
| Virginia | n = 42 | 2.405 |

## 5. Community School versus Regular School

The American sample enabled a further comparison between schools identified as community schools and regular schools (see table 7).

Table 7: Comparison between community schools and regular schools on the basis of perceived effectiveness

| | USA | | AUSTRALIA | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| non community schools | n = 378 | 2.177 | n = 427 | 2.205 |
| community schools | n = 195 | 2.313 | N/A | |

Overall, regular schools (2.177) were seen to be more effective than community schools (2.313). Elementary schools (2.074) were seen to be significantly more effective (.05) than elementary community schools (2.239) and secondary community schools (2.365) and were also more effective (but not significantly so) than secondary schools (2.204). However, the levels of effectiveness of community and regular schools varied

from state to state and, in the case of the largest sample (Utah), from district to district. Although in all states regular elementary schools were seen to be more effective than elementary community schools, in Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin, secondary community schools were seen to be more effective than regular secondary schools. In Utah eight of the fourteen school districts used ranked community schools as more effective than regular schools.

This table also indicates that regular schools in the United States were generally seen to be slightly, but not significantly more effective than regular schools in Australia.

One aspect of the Australian research that was not duplicated in America was the request for respondents to identify which of six alternatives they felt was the most important role of an effective school. They were asked to choose between:

1. The **major role** of an effective school is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the basic academic skills.
2. The **major role** of an effective school is to provide students with the skills necessary for future employment.
3. The **major role** of an effective school is to provide society with productive citizens.
4. The **major role** of an effective school is to provide students with a healthy self concept.
5. The **major role** of an effective school is to develop a value system that reflects the spiritual nature of man.
6. The **major role** of an effective school is to respond to the educational needs of its local community.

Nearly twenty three percent (22.9%) of respondents chose the 'academic' alternative. However, this response was closely followed by 'citizenship' (21.3%), 'other' roles identified by the respondents (20.8%), and 'personal development' (16.9%). There was less support for 'employment' (10.3%), 'responding to the community' (6.9%) and to 'spiritual' (0.9%). Almost all who identified 'other' indicated that it was not possible for a school to concentrate on a single role and still be considered to be effective. This result indicates that although the academic role was highly favoured, other roles of the school were also viewed by the sample as being extremely important. It would be interesting to compare these results with those generated by an American sample.

## SOME OBSERVATIONS

The American sample was significantly more positive about many of the roles of an effective school than were the Australian sample. This was particularly the case for the roles of the school that considered the academic, employment, leadership, and teachers

as role models dimensions of the work of the school. On the other hand, the Australian sample was more strongly positive, although not significantly so, for the role of the school that helps students understand themselves and others and that which considers a balanced curriculum. The high proportion of elementary school respondents in Australia (66.7%) and the high proportion of secondary respondents in the America (78.6%) may have influenced this result. However, this was not the case since, in the Australian sample the only role in which secondary schools were more strongly positive than elementary schools was for 'student involvement' (at .001 level). On the other hand elementary schools were significantly more positive about 'caring environment' (at .001 level); about 'value system' (at .05 level) and about 'teachers as role models' (at .01 level).

Although the respondents in America were generally stronger than their Australian counterparts, the patterns of response from the various groups of respondents were similar. For the most part in both countries, the strong support for the majority of the statements by principals, and the weak support by students, showed that there is a considerable difference of opinion between these two groups. The only similarity in their levels of support was for 'employment'. In America, students were significantly weaker in their support for 'caring environment', 'citizenship' and 'teachers as role models' than both teachers and parents were. This was similar in Australia, where students had significantly different levels of support to parents for all statements and to teachers for all statements except 'employment'. In both Australia and America, students were significantly stronger in their support for 'student involvement' than were teachers and parents. In Australia, only a few differences emerged between teachers and parents. Teachers' attitudes to 'employment' were weaker than those of parents. In America, teachers were more positive than parents for 'academic', 'employment', 'caring environment' and 'understanding self and others'. The overall result has left principals and students as the two extreme groups, with teachers and parents having fairly similar and more conservative views.

The results suggest that generally, the American sample, and particularly principals and teachers, had higher levels of concern with the outputs of education, as typified by academic, employment and leadership capabilities and the Australian sample was more concerned with the process components that help to shape that education, such as a balanced curriculum and an emphasis on student personal and social development.

However, the results of the second section clearly show, that regardless of the major emphasis on various roles that the effective school might adopt, the conditions which lead to that school becoming effective are the same for both the Australian and the American sample. It is clear that an effective school has good leadership and staff, good policies and a safe and supportive environment in which staff, parents and students are

encouraged to work as a team towards common goals. The nature of the goals is less important than the way in which the school moves towards them.

Perhaps the most significant result of the study was the level of support given to the work schools are doing. Respondents were given the opportunity to consider what goals an effective school should have and what factors within the school need to be operating well for the school to be seen as effective. That nearly 60% of the sample in both countries indicated that their school was more effective than other schools indicates a resounding measure of support for the work of schools, despite current negative media publicity and the many constraints, including financial, ideological and restructuring issues, that are currently acting upon schools. These constraints have created a situation where many school systems are increasing the workload of people in schools at a time when the budget for public education is generally dropping. To have achieved such a strong measure of support at such a crisis time for public education is a credit to those involved in the education of our children.

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APPENDIX 1: Descriptions of the eighteen selected elements of an effective school

## 1. Elements concerned with the School Staff

ACADEMIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP

The Principal acts as the academic and administrative leader, effectively communicating the goals of the school to the staff, parents, students and community. Staff and parents in the school are given the opportunity to develop leadership skills.

DEDICATED AND QUALIFIED STAFF

Teachers are well trained and show the skills involved in quality teaching. Teachers care about students and their success in school, work as a team and exhibit positive morale and enthusiasm for their work.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT

High quality staff development programs are offered to the school staff. The programs are based on identified school goals and involve the entire staff and other appropriate people such as school councillors or parents. Staff and school council members are involved in the planning of staff development activities.

## 2. Elements concerned with the school environment

CLEAR SCHOOL PURPOSE (POLICY)

Staff, students and the community know what the school goals are, and are able to express these goals. The school policy serves as a focal point for the curriculum and the primary goals of the school relate to student learning and achievement.

SAFE AND ORDERLY ENVIRONMENT

The school has an orderly environment that is conducive to teaching and learning. Students feel safe from physical harm, know and understand the discipline policy, and that rule enforcement will be fair and consistent.

POSITIVE SCHOOL CLIMATE

Staff, students and parents are all proud of their school and the people who work within it. People comment positively about the school and its students, and the school program aims to recognize those who do well.

HOME-SCHOOL RELATIONS

Parent involvement in the school is welcome and appreciated. Parents are encouraged to help their children at home, participate in school activities and be involved in school decision-making.

## 3. Elements related to instructional procedures

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

Staff and parents believe that all students have the capacity to succeed, and that staff and parent involvement is a critical factor in student achievement.

ACADEMIC FOCUS TO THE CURRICULUM

The curriculum materials, instructional methods and assessment procedures within the school are all closely aligned to the basic academic goals that the students are expected to accomplish.

TIME ON TASK

Teachers allocate a significant amount of time to instruct the children in the literacy and numeracy skills. During this time students are engaged in planned learning activities.

MONITORING STUDENT PROGRESS

Feedback on student academic progress is obtained frequently using a variety of assessment methods. The results of tests are used to improve individual student performance and also to evaluate the success of the curriculum.

EARLY IDENTIFICATION OF LEARNING DIFFICULTIES

A concerted effort is made to identify learning difficulties as soon as possible and provide remedial or other appropriate assistance directed at correcting those specific difficulties.

POSITIVE MOTIVATIONAL STRATEGIES

Teachers use strategies that will inspire the children to learn. Education is seen as a challenging, worthwhile activity.

## 4. Elements relating to the organizational procedures of the school and school system

SCHOOL BASED DECISION MAKING

Most of the decisions relating to policy, curriculum and school organisation are made at the local level by the principal, school councillors, teachers, students and parents of the school. Only those decisions that have regional or state wide implications are made at those levels.

LOCAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE SELECTION OF SENIOR STAFF

The school has a role to play in the selection process of the principal of the school. Applicants for the position of principal should have a good understanding of the policy of the school.

TEACHERS TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR AND ARE INVOLVED IN SCHOOL PLANNING

The Principal encourages teachers to take an active role in curriculum and school planning. Teachers accept the responsibility for the provision of appropriate activities to enhance the children's learning.

THE SUPPORT OF THE RESPONSIBLE EDUCATION AUTHORITY

The school has the active support of both the Ministry of Education and the Region for the implementation of school programs. Resources are at an appropriate level and support services are readily available.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENT INVOLVEMENT AND RESPONSIBILITY

Opportunities are provided for student involvement in decision making process at the school. Students are given the opportunity to develop and practise leadership skills.

APPENDIX 2: Demographic characteristics of the sample

| School Type | Australia | | USA | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| Primary/Elementary Schools | 285 | 66.7 | 67 | 11.7 | 352 | 35.2 |
| Elementary Community Schools | | | 45 | 7.9 | 45 | 4.5 |
| Secondary Schools | 142 | 33.3 | 304 | 53.1 | 446 | 44.6 |
| Secondary Community Schools | | | 146 | 25.5 | 146 | 14.6 |

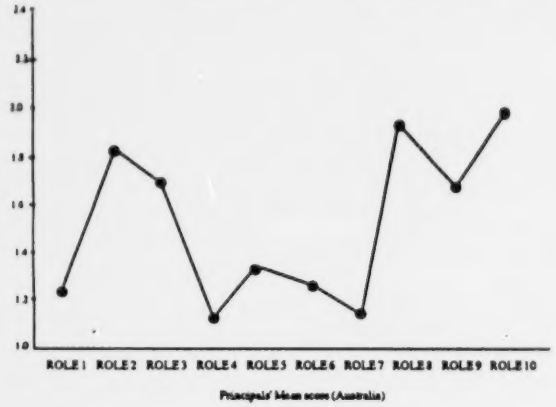
| Student body size | Australia | | USA | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| less than 51 students | 23 | 5.4 | 0 | 0 | 23 | 2.3 |
| between 51 and 150 students | 31 | 7.3 | 11 | 19.2 | 42 | 4.2 |
| between 150 and 400 students | 173 | 40.5 | 67 | 11.2 | 240 | 24.0 |
| between 400 and 800 students | 134 | 31.4 | 195 | 34.0 | 329 | 32.9 |
| more than 800 students | 65 | 15.2 | 300 | 52.4 | 365 | 36.5 |

| Age levels | Australia | | USA | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| less than 21 | 49 | 11.5 | 157 | 27.4 | 206 | 20.6 |
| between 21 and 30 | 55 | 12.9 | 30 | 5.2 | 85 | 8.5 |
| between 30 and 40 | 163 | 38.4 | 133 | 23.2 | 296 | 29.6 |
| between 40 and 50 | 125 | 29.3 | 202 | 35.3 | 327 | 32.7 |
| over 50 | 35 | 8.9 | 74 | 12.9 | 109 | 10.9 |

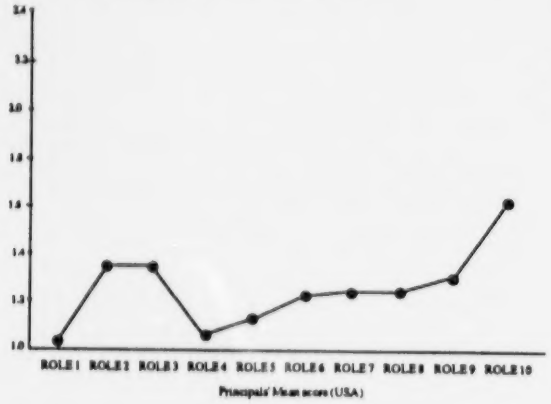
| Gender | Australia | | USA | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| male | 145 | 34.0 | 230 | 40.1 | 375 | 37.5 |
| female | 280 | 66.0 | 341 | 59.5 | 621 | 62.1 |

| Position in School | Australia | | USA | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total | % | Total | % | Total | % |
| Principal | 68 | 15.9 | 52 | 9.1 | 120 | 12.0 |
| Teacher | 157 | 37.0 | 192 | 33.5 | 349 | 34.9 |
| Parent | 149 | 34.9 | 167 | 29.1 | 316 | 31.6 |
| Student | 53 | 12.4 | 160 | 27.9 | 213 | 21.3 |

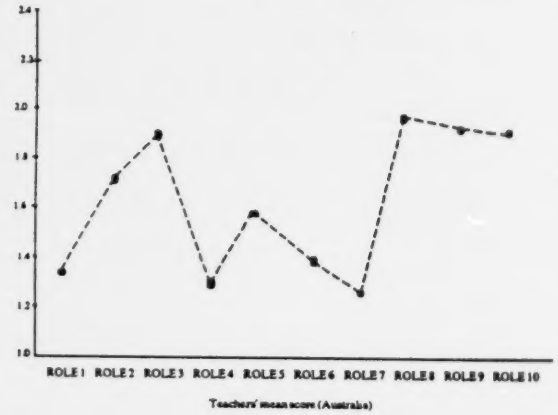
APPENDIX 3: The role of the effective school analysed for country and position



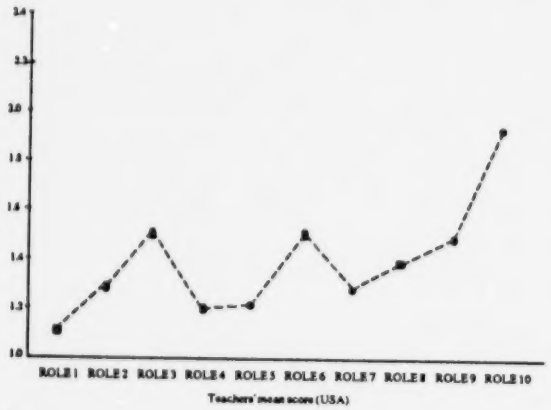

Principals' Mean score (Australia)



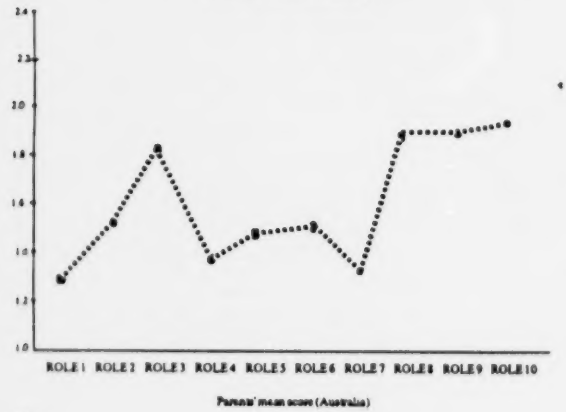

Principals' Mean score (USA)



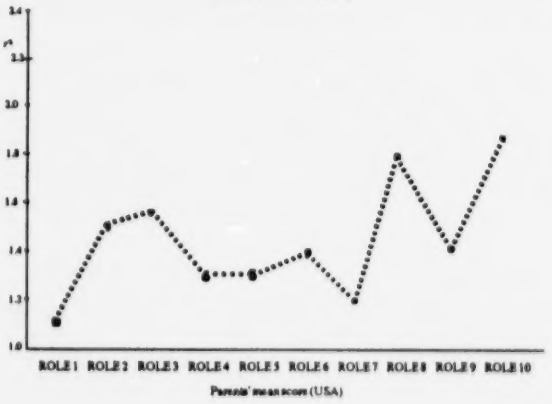

Teachers' mean score (Australia)



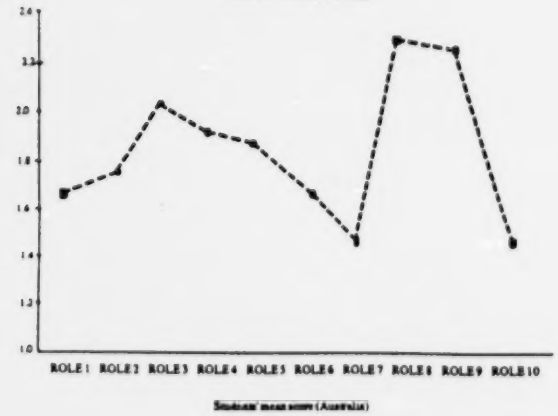

Teachers' mean score (USA)



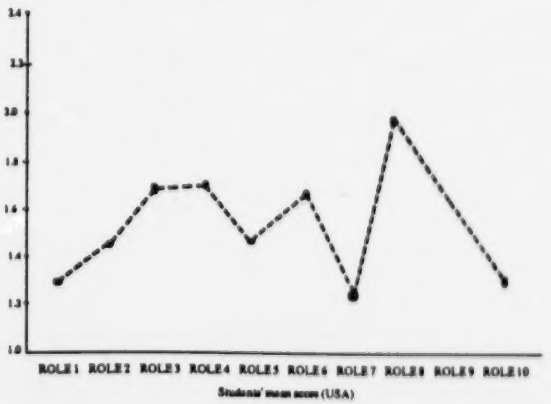

Parents' mean score (Australia)




Parents' mean score (USA)




Students' mean score (Australia)




Students' mean score (USA)